Uniformity Examined,

Whether it be found in the

GOSPEL,

OR

In the PRACTICE of the Churches,

OF

CHRIST.

By WIL. DELL, Minister of the Gospel.

2 Cor. 4. 13.

We having the same spirit of Faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken: we also believe, and therefore speak.

Published according to Order.

London, Printed, 1651.

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Vniformity Examined.

OBſerving that our Brethren of *Scotland*, together with the *Aſſembly of Divines*, and the reſt of the *Presbyterian* judgement, do often both in their Diſcourſe and writings, exceedingly preſs for *Uniformity*; I have been urged in my ſpirit, to think upon the matter, and to conſider whether there could be any ſuch thing found in the *Word* of the *New Teſtament*, or in the *practice* of the *Churches of Chriſt*. And for my part, I ingenuouſly profeſs, I cannot yet diſcover it, and would be glad if any would inſtruct me further in this particular, ſo he do it from the *Word*.

Now *Uniformity* what is it, but an *unity of form?* and the *form* they mean, no doubt, is *outward*: for the *inward* form, as it cannot be known by the outward ſenſes; ſo neither can it be accompliſhed by *outward power*. And therefore (till I know their meaning better) I conceive that by *uniformity* they underſtand an *unity of outward form* in the Churches of God: yea, ſome of them do declare ſo much, calling the thing they would have, *External Uniformity*.

Now ſuch a thing as this (after ſo much meditation and recollection, as my other imployments, and the many diſtractions that neceſſarily attend my preſent condition, will permit me) I cannot diſcern, in the Word of the *Goſpel*. For Chriſt ſpeaking of the *Church* of the *New Teſtament*, ſaith, *Joh.* 4. 23. *The hour cometh and now is, when the true worſhippers ſhall worſhip the Father*

ther in Spirit and Truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and Truth. In which words it is most evident, that the *worship of God* in the time of the *New Testament*, is *inward* and *spiritual*, consisting in faith, hope, love, and in prayer, which is the operation of the three former, &c. And so, is so far from *Uniformity* as it hath been *explicated*, and as they *understand* it, that it is not at all *capable* of it. And therefore I cannot but *Wonder*, at the strange workings of darkness in the minds of men, who would have an exernal *Uniformity*, in a worship that is *inward* and *spiritual*; and of which, the *outward form* is no part at all, but is meerly *accidental*, and so absolutely *various*.

Again, as I finde not this *Uniformity*, in the *doctrine of the Gospel*, so neither in the *practice of the Saints*, who had the spirit of the Gospel, as that *practice* is represented to us, in the *Word*.

In *Acts* 1. 14. I read, how the *Apostles* being together with the women, and *Mary* the Mother of Jesus, and his brethren, *continued* ὁμοθυμαδὸν *With one accord or mind in prayer and supplication*; and *Acts* 2. *v.* 44. & 46. how *all that believed were together, and continued daily* ὁμοθυμαδὸν *with one minde in the Temple, and did break bread from house to house*, &c. And in all this there was *Unity*, but no *external Uniformity*, neither *name* nor *thing*. Again, *Acts* 4. 23. *Peter* and *John* being let go by the Magistrates, *went to their own company* (which many of our Clergy would term a Conventicle) *and reported all that the chief Priests and Elders had said to them*; *and when they heard it, they lift up their voice to God,* ὁμοθυμαδὸν, *With one mind, and prayed.* Here was *inward Unity*, in faith, and love, and joy, and spiritual prayer, but no *external Uniformity*: and vers 32. *The multitude of them that believed, were of one heart, and one soul. Unity* still, but nothing of *external Uniformity*. Further, we read *Acts* chap. 7. and chap. 8 that *Stephen* and *Philip*, who by the *Church* were ordained *Deacons*, and were to serve only for the Ministery of the Table, yet by vertue of the *anointing*, preached the Word of God freely, and powerfully: and how *all* the *Members* of the Church of *Jerusalem*, who were neither *Ministers* nor *Deacons*, being scattered abroad by Persecution, went *Preaching* the Word everywhere, where they came, in that case of necessity: the unction of the

Spirit

Spirit of which all Believers partake alike, being one *fundamental* ground of such *Miniſtery*, where there are no *Believers* to call to the Office: and in this, though there was *unity* of faith, ſpirit, and doctrine, yet I am ſure they will ſay, there was no ſuch *uniformity* as they would have. Again, *Acts* 20. *Paul* the firſt day of the Week, preached to the Diſciples of *Macedonia*, from the Evening till Midnight (which Dr. *Pocklington* in a printed Sermon ſaith, was *out of order*, that is, out of *Prelatical order*, or *Presbyterial Uniformity*) and after brake bread, and did eat, and talked with them a long while, till *break of day*: and going from thence, he arrived at *Epheſus*, and there called the *Elders* of the Chuch together, and appeals to them after what manner he had been with them, to wit, *ſerving the Lord with all humility of minde, and with many tears and temptations*, &c. and how, *he had held back nothing profitable for them, but had taught them publikely, and from houſe to houſe* (which I wiſh were more in uſe now-a-dayes, if it might obtain ſo much leave from *Uniformity*) *and had preached to them Repentance towards God, and Faith towards our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*: our chief work towards *God* ſince our fall and corruption being *Repentance*, which is the change of the creature towards God, through Gods own work in the creature: and this is not done without the ſorrow of the fleſh; and our chief work towards *Chriſt*, who is given to us as a head, being *Faith* or Union. And in the end, exhorts the *Presbyters*, *to take heed to themſelves* (who according to the Church principles of this age, want no admonition *themſelves*, ſeeing they are become a *peremptory* rule to all *others*) *and to the flocks over which the holy Spirit* (and not Patrons) *had made them Over-ſeers, to feed the Church of God, which he had purchaſed with his own blood*, &c. But in *all* this, neither *practices* himſelf, nor *preaches* to them, nor *commands* them to preach to others, or impoſe upon others, any ſuch kind of thing as *external uniformity*. And ſo ſurely, they that ſo vehemently urge this thing, that they make it *all in all*, in their *Reformation*, have ſome other teacher then the *Apoſtle*, who being taught of *Chriſt*, as Chriſt was taught of *God*, yet knew no ſuch thing at all, in the *worſhip* of God as *Uniformity*.

And yet further, that the *world* (if it be poſſible) may be the more convinced, obſerve a little more ſeriouſly the practice of *Chriſt* and the *Saints*, in reference to this point, and you ſhall ſee

nothing leſs then *external Uniformity*. See this in the *prayer of Chriſt*, (*Prayer* for the duty it ſelf, being nothing, but ſo much *ſpiritual* worſhip, as being the voyce of the *Spirit* in the *fleſh*, both in *head* & *members*) *This*, Chriſt ſometimes performed, with his *eyes* lifted up to Heaven, ſometimes being proſtrate with his *body* on the Earth, and *ſo ſeveral* times, *ſeveral* wayes: and as he, ſo the *Saints*, have; *ſome* prayed ſtanding & lifting up their hands, as *Moſes*; *ſome*, kneeling and lifting up their hands, as *Solomon*; *ſome*, ſtanding and not lifting up their eyes, as the *Publican*, &c. And what *external Uniformity* in all this? And as for *Praying*, ſo for *Preaching*; Chriſt ſometimes preached in a *ſhip*, ſometimes on the *ſhoar*, ſometimes in the *City Jeruſalem*, ſometimes in the *Temple*, ſometimes in the *Deſart*, ſometimes *early*, ſometimes *late*, as if he intended on *purpoſe*, to witneſs, againſt that piece of the *Myſtery of Iniquity*, which in after Ages ſhould be called *Uniformity*. So *Paul* preached ſometimes on the *Jews Sabbath*, ſometimes on the *firſt day* of the week, ſometimes *each day* of the week, ſometimes in the *day*, ſometimes in the *night*; ſometimes prayed in the *houſe*, ſometimes on the *ſhoar*: he circumciſed *Timothy* among the *weak*, refuſed to circumciſe *Titus* among the *perverſe*, became as a *Jew* to the *Jews*, as a *Greek* to the *Greeks*, to the *weak* as *weak*, to the *ſtrong* as *ſtrong*, all things to all men, that he might win ſome: and what *external Uniformity* was here? And then for the *Sacraments*, Chriſt adminiſtred the Sacrament of the *Supper*, immediately *after Supper*; *Paul* at *midnight*, and it may be others in the *morning*, or at *noone*: and what *external Uniformity* in all this? And for *Government*; ſometimes the *Apoſtles* met together into a *Councel*, and in that Councel ordered things not of their *own heads*, or by *plurality of voyces*, but by the *Word* and *Spirit*; and what they *ordered* by the Word and Spirit, they put in *execution* by the power of the *Word* and *Spirit*, and not by the power of the *World*. At other times, *Miniſters* and *Believers*, did things by the *Word* and *Spirit* among themſelves, by the mutual conſent of *both*; or elſe *Believers* alone among themſelves, if there were no *Miniſters* preſent. And where the *number* of Believers were *more*, they ſtood in need of *more* Officers: and where *fewer*, of *fewer* Officers; and all theſe things, are the *free* ordering of the *Churches*, who have *Chriſt*, the *Spirit*, and the *Father* among them, and in them, and ſo are taken

taken out of the *bondage* of men, into the *freedom* of God. That truly I see not the *Gospel*, more setting its *spirit*, against any thing of *Antichrist*, then against this point of *external uniformity*. For if we have *one* Lord, Christ, Spirit, Faith, Baptism, and God, all other things are *free* to the Churches, as *God* shall order by them, and no otherwise; and the reason, and wisdom, and prudence of *man*, have no place in *this* world, where the *Sun of righteousness* shines, as the only light?

But against this that hath been said, do lie some *objections*; as first,

The Prophet foretold that *the Lord should be one, and his name one*, and doth not this imply *external uniformity*.

I answer, nothing less: for the *Apostle* explicates plainly and clearly, what it is to have the *Lord one*, and his *name one*, among believers, *Eph.4.ch.4.5.6.* where he saith, there is in the spiritual Church, *one Body, and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and father of all, Who is above all, through all, and in all.* Where you see, that among believers, there is a *manifold unity*, but no *external uniformity*; yea the prayer of *Christ the Son*, for the Church, unfolds clearly the promise of *God the Father* to the Church, *Joh.17.* Christ prays, *that they all* (who are *many* among themselves, according to the *flesh*) *may be one as thou Father art in me, and I in thee,* (that is according to the *unity* of the Spirit, not *external uniformity*) *that after this manner they also may be one in us.*

But again it is objected out of *1 Cor.* 14. that the Apostle requires that *all things may be done in the Church decently and in order*: and doth not this imply *external uniformity*?

I answer, that they will hardly admit in their *Parish Churches*, such a *decency* and *order* as the Apostle there means, neither are they *capable* of it. For he saith before, *When the whole Church is come together into some place, that all may prophesie one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted*: and that during this exercise of prophesying, *if any thing be revealed to another, the former to give place*; and *he* must speak that hath the *cleerest* light, seeing the *Spirit*, to whomsoever it is given, it is given to *profit withall*. And that though *all* may prophesie *one by one*, yet all may not prophesie at *once*, for then it would not be *order*, but *confusion*, which the Apostle would have avoided, saying, *Let all things be done decently and in order.* And *this* decency too, he *perswades* to by the

word, he doth not *enforce* by *ſecular power*: And if they will call this *uniformity*, for beleevers to propheſie one after another, according to the *variety* of the gifts of the Spirit, and not many, or two or three at once, or the ſame time, we willingly agree with them: but how far *this* thing, is from *their* ſence, every one knows.

Thus you ſee, theſe *objections* anſwered, and I am confident there are no more can be brought, but may as clearly and eaſily be anſwered as theſe.

And therefore, I ſay, I *wonder*, and wonder again, that we having *covenanted* and agreed together ſolemnly, to endeavour for a *Government* moſt agreeable to the *word of God*, ſhould in the mean time, be left ſo void, of the *ſpirit* and *light* of the Goſpel, as to fall upon *external uniformity*, which is nowhere to be found in the *Goſpel*, nor in the *practiſe* of primitive Chriſtians.

Yea, while I conſider more ſeriouſly of the Matter, me thinks *external uniformity* is a monſtrous thing, (how glorious ſoever in their eyes) and not to be found either in *nature* or in *grace*, either in *Chriſts* Kingdom, or the Kingdoms of the *World*.

In nature is no *external uniformity* extended to all the works of nature; for look into the *world*, and ſee if there be not *variety* of forms; *heavenly* and *earthly* bodies, having ſeveral form; and in the *earth*, each bird, beaſt, tree, plant, creature, *differs* one from another, in *outward form*. If the *whole* creation, ſhould appear in *one form*, or *external uniformity*, what a *monſtrous* thing would it be, nothing differing from the *firſt chaos*? But the *variety* of *forms* in the world is the *beauty* of the world: So that though there be a moſt *admirable unity* among all the creatures, yet there is nothing leſs then *external uniformity*.

Again, as there is no *external uniformity* ſpread over the *great world*, ſo nor yet over the *little world*, or *man*. For look upon a man, conſiſting of *head* and *members*, unto which the Apoſtle compares the *Church*, and you ſhall not finde all the members like one another, neither in regard of their *outward forms*, nor *operations*: for the *hand*, doth not move as the *foot*, nor the *foot* act as the *hand*; and if all the members ſhould appear and act in *one form*, what a *monſter* would a man be? And yet among the members, though there be no *external uniformity*, yet there is *admirable unity*.

And yet again, look into the Kingdoms of the *world*, and you ſhall

ſhall ſee no ſuch thing in them as *external uniformity*: Here in *England* you ſhall obſerve that *York* is not governed as *Hull*, nor *Hull* as *Hallifax*, nor that as *Briſtol*, *&c.* neither is one *County* governed *uniformly* as another; there is no *uniformity* in the government of *Kent* and *Eſſex*; nor one *town*, governed like another; in *Godmanchester*, the *youngeſt* ſon inherits, in *Huntington* the *Eldeſt*: nor one *Corporation* governed like another, nor one *Company* in the City governed as another; and yet between all Counties, Cities, Towns, Corporations, Companies, there is *unity*, though no *external uniformity*. Yea, look upon the famous City of *London*, and there are, it may be, an hundred thouſand *families*, or more in it, and each one governed after a *ſeveral* manner, and among all theſe families, there is no *external uniformity*, and yet they all agree well enough, in the *unity* of a *City*.

Nay further, to bring but *one man*, to an *uniformity* of *life* and *practice*, by an outward Law, would be the moſt abſolute *tyranny* in the world, and make his life worſe then death. To compel every man by a *Law* every *day* in the week, or every *Munday*, *Tuſeday*, &c. in the week, to an *uniformity* of life, that he ſhall *riſe* at the ſame time, uſe the ſame *poſtures*, ſpeak the ſame *words*, eat the ſame *food*, receive the ſame *phyſick*, ſit, and ſtand, and walk, and lie down at the ſame ſet times, who ever heard of ſuch a cruel bondage? What an *abſurd* and *intolerable* thing then is *uniformity* in the life of a *man*, taking away all *freedom* of the ſoul? But how much more evil and intolerable is *uniformity* in the life of a *Chriſtian*, or of the true Churches of Chriſt, taking away all freedom of the *Spirit of God*, who being *one* with God, works in the *freedom* of God, and is not to be *bound*, with any authoritative or coercive power, of poor, dark, ignorant, vain, fooliſh, proud, and ſinful men?

What now then do the *Presbyters* mean by *uniformity*? Would they have the word preached, and the Sacraments adminiſtred, and the name of God called on, and all this done in *Spirit* and *truth*, in the Churches of Chriſt? this truly is *unity* and not *uniformity*, and ſuch an *unity* as no man can *compel*. But would they have, the Word preached, the name of God called on, Sacraments adminiſtred, the ſpiritual Diſcipline of the ſpiritual Church mannaged, the vertues of Chriſt, and graces of the Spirit in the Saints exerciſed, and all this in one and the ſame *outward form*, or *uniformity*?

This

This is the burthen of the Saints, the bondage of the Church, the straitning of the Spirit, the limiting of Christ, and the eclipsing the glory of the Father. And how *wise* so ever, these men may be, in natural and carnal things: yet their *wisdom*, is but *foolishness* in spiritual things, in which there is no more *uniformity*, then in the *workings* of the *Spirit*, who works *severally*, in *several* Saints, and *severally*, in the *same* Saints, at *several* times: And therefore they that would tye the *Church* to an *uniformity*, which works not of it self, but as the *Spirit* works in it, let them first tye the *Spirit*, to an *uniformity*, and we are contented. But these men, seem to run a sad hazard, who would thus reduce the workings of the *Spirit*, in Christians and Churches, to an *outward uniformity*, according to their own *mind* and *fancy*, and so would rule and order, and enlarge and straiten the *Spirit of God*, by the *spirit of man*, seeing it is worse, to sin against Christ in the *Spirit*, then against Christ in the *flesh*.

And therefore, till I be otherwise taught by the *Word*, I cannot conceive that there *ought* to be, or is *possible* to be, any such *external uniformity*, in the Churches of Christ, as these men strive, wrastle, sweat, contend for, I will not say are ready to fight for: but that *several* Churches of Christ, having *unity* of doctrine, faith, the Spirit, ordinances, &c. may have *divers forms*, of outward administrations, as God and Christ by the Spirit shall lead them; and that every Church, is in these things to be left *free*, and no Church *forced*, by any *outward power*, to follow or imitate another Church, against its *will*, not being *freely* led unto it, by the *Spirit* of God.

Neither do I think, that God hath set up, any *company* of men, or *Synod* in the world, to shine to a *whole Nation*, so that all People shall be *constrained* to follow *their* judgement, and to walk by *their* light, seeing *other Ministers* and *Christians*, may have *more* light and spirit, then *they*. Neither hath *Christ*, promised his presence and spirit, to *Ministers* more then to *believers*, nor more to an *hundred*, then *two or three*: And if *two* or *three* Christians in the Country, being met together in the *name* of Christ, have *Christ* himself, with his *word* and *Spirit* among them, they need not *ride* many miles to the *Assembly* at *London*, to know *what* to do, or *how* to carry and behave themselves, in the *things* of *God*. And therefore, for any company of men, of what *repute* soever, to set up their *own judgement* in a Kingdom, for a *peremptory rule*, from

from which no *man* must vary, and to *compel* all the faithful people of God, who are the very *members* of Jesus Christ himself, to *fall down* before it, upon pain of being cast into the burning fiery furnace of their indignation, heated seven times more hot then ordinary, through the desired access of *secular power* to their power, is a far *worse* work, in my eyes, then that of King *Nebuchadnezzars* setting up a *golden Image*, and *forcing* all to fall down before it; seeing *spiritual* Idolatry, is so much *worse* then *corporal*, as the spirit is *better* then the flesh.

And therefore I do think (let them teach me better by the *Word* that can) that *uniformity* (the great *Diana* of the *Presbyterians*, and the Image that falls down from the *brain* and *fancy* of man) hath no footing in the *Scriptures*, or in the *practise* of the Churches of *Christ*: And that the *Presbyterian uniformity*, is neer a kin to *Prelatical conformity*, and is no other then the *same thing*, under *another word*, after the manner of *Prelacy* and *Presbytery*; and do conclude, that *unity* is Christian, *uniformity* Antichristian.

And this I have only *hinted*, and that briefly, among many occasions, to discover to the faithfull, that some of the very *dregs* of *Antichristianisme*, still prevail and domineer, under the very name of *Reformation*: And also to give occasion, to men of more spirit, and abilities, and leisure, to discourse more fully to this point, that the Serpents head of *Formality*, which is so carefully nourished by *humane reason*, may be crushed in pieces by the *power* of the *word*.

1 John 2. 27.

The annointing which ye have received of him, abideth in you, and ye need not that any man should teach you, but as the same annointing teacheth you all things, and is truth, and is no lye, and even as it hath taught you, you shall abide in him.

The *spiritual Church* is taught by the *anointing*, the *carnal* Church by *Councels*.

FINIS.